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## **Senate and House unanimously approve Mackinac Bridge legislation**

**LANSING** – Legislation designed to help ensure the future of the Mackinac Bridge and the authority that governs it was recently passed by the Senate and House of Representatives with unanimous support.

The package is sponsored by state Sen. Jason Allen and Reps. Tom Casperson and Kevin Elsenheimer.

“I’m pleased that these bills have received overwhelming support in both the Senate and House,” said Allen, R- Traverse City. “In light of the actions taken by MDOT over the summer, there is a clear need to define the working relationship between MDOT and the Mackinac Bridge Authority. I am glad that all parties involved were able to work in a bi-partisan manner and do what is best for the Mackinac Bridge.”

The legislation mirrors an agreement which was signed by the governor, Michigan Department of Transportation Director Gloria Jeff and Mackinac Bridge Authority Chair William H. Gnodtke. Under the agreement, the MDOT director will defer to the judgment of the Mackinac Bridge Authority on all matters related to the traditional powers, duties, and functions of the MBA.

“This legislation is an example of everyone working together on behalf of something important to the entire state,” said Casperson, R-Escanaba. “The governor’s signature on these bills will mean a clear, understandable explanation of who has which responsibilities and duties that will keep the Mackinac Bridge a proud symbol of Michigan for years to come.”

Once signed by the governor the bills will:

- Repeal the section of law that stipulates that the MBA will revert to Michigan Department of Transportation control once the bridge debt is paid, allowing the authority to retain control of decision making in perpetuity;
- Clearly outline the specific functions which the MBA is responsible for outside of MDOT’s jurisdiction; and
- Clarify how the finances of the bridge will be handled, insuring that bridge revenue and earnings will be only used for Mackinac Bridge and not diverted for other purposes.

(More)

Although the agreement between the authority and the administration fully restores power to the authority, the agreement needs to become statute to prevent possible future takeover attempts.

“We’re looking forward to quick action from the governor to sign these bills,” said Elsenheimer, R-Bellaire. “We have worked closely with her administration in crafting these bills to mirror the agreement between her office and the MBA, so there’s no reason why she shouldn’t support these bills.”

At a town hall meeting hosted by Allen, Casperson and Elsenheimer earlier this fall, Jeff’s decision to take away the decades-long responsibilities of the authority based on her interpretation of attorney general opinions from the 1960s was subject to harsh criticism from northern Michigan residents. This shift of power and subsequent outcry led to the recent agreement.

Senate Bills 829-830, sponsored by Allen, and House Bills 5333 and 5339, sponsored by Casperson and Elsenheimer, will now go to the governor for her signature.

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